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FM RPO DUBAI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0655

INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0499

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

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RUEHDIR/RPO DUBAI 0656

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000525

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM IR

SUBJECT: IRAN: REGIME TAKES STUDENT DAY PROTESTS IN STRIDE

REF: RPO DUBAI 521

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Iran's December 7 'Student Day' demonstrations appear to have been largely confined to campuses and their immediate surroundings, but drew significant participation and in several cases ended in violent confrontations between protestors and security forces and/or government supporters. Estimates of the protests' size vary from a few thousand to tens of thousands of participants, in at least a dozen universities throughout Iran. Eyewitnesses report many arrests though the actual tally of those arrested or injured is unknown. 'Green Path' opposition leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, and former President Khatami did not attend the rallies, though Mousavi's wife did appear briefly at Tehran University before being sprayed with tear gas. Breaking with longstanding tradition, neither President Ahmadinejad nor any other notable IRIG officials ventured onto campuses to deliver the customary Student Day addresses. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Student Day demonstrations appear to have been largely confined to campuses and their immediate surroundings, but drew significant participation and in several cases ended in violent confrontations between protestors and security forces and/or government supporters. Despite extensive government attempts to prevent Student Day opposition activities (reftel), amateur video posted to the Internet and eyewitness accounts indicate that anti-government protests took place at at least a dozen universities across Iran. In Tehran, campus protests spilled into surrounding streets, where participants clashed with security forces and Basijis wielded batons and tear gas to disperse protestors. Initial reports that one or two protestors were shot in Tehran have not been substantiated; however, eyewitness reports abound of security forces firing into the air. One reformist news website reports that a young woman was badly injured after being thrown from a building at a university in western Iran. The number of arrests is not yet known, though the detention of at least one prominent student activist at Amir Kabir University was well documented, and Fars News reports detainees are being interrogated. Opposition websites allege that dozens of protestors were arrested, both on and off campus.

The conservative website Jahan News reported several "honorary" BBC reporters were arrested at Tehran University while filming a demonstration.

¶3. (C) 'Green Path' titular leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi and former President Khatami did not participate in any events. A reformist website reported that as on November 4, Mousavi was prevented from joining the students by government supporters who surrounded his office. Khatami issued a statement December 8 expressing his 'regret' that he was unable to join the students. Mousavi's well-known wife Zahra Rahnavard did appear at the University of Tehran campus briefly before being 'escorted' away by security guards, reportedly after being sprayed with tear gas. Ayatollah Rafsanjani's outspoken daughter Faezeh Hashemi is clearly visible in videos marching with demonstrators near Tehran University; initial reports that she was arrested appear incorrect.

¶4. (C) Breaking with longstanding tradition, neither President Ahmadinejad nor any other notable IRIG officials ventured onto campuses to deliver the customary Student Day addresses. No official reason was given for Ahmadinejad's decision to stay away from campuses this year. Unsurprisingly, Iranian official press coverage of the day's demonstrations was either absent or severely distorted: one especially surreal official press report noted that the demonstrators used tear gas against the security forces. As in the past, pro-IRGC 'Fars News' set the tone for official coverage, with all other official and semi-official media following its lead. Demonstrators were consistently referred to as 'Mousavi supporters' while pro-government Basiji demonstrators were labeled as 'exalted students.' Official press cited the demonstrators as few in number and seeking to bring about violent altercations, while the putatively far greater pro-government Basiji demonstrators were commended for their restraint in the face of these provocations.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Participants in the December 7 protests were almost exclusively students - perhaps not surprising given the event's nature. The demonstrators were able to force the government's hand in significant ways, to include: extensive

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round-ups of 'the usual suspects' in the build-up to December 7; the unprecedented show of force around Tehran campuses on the day itself; the hobbling of communications such as internet, mobile phone and SMS; the three-day shutdown of foreign media; and the conspicuous absence of notable IRIG officials from Student Day ceremonies. Nevertheless, the government again proved it can rather easily contain 'Green Path' popular protests. Whether the 'Green Path' opposition will be able to regain its ability to demonstrate broad-based support among the larger population will be next tested on the Shia mourning ceremonies that culminate in Tasua and Ashura, December 26 and 27 respectively. END COMMENT.

EYRE